DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 379 272 SP 035 804

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TITLE A Prolegomenon to Postmodern Teaching.
PUB DATE Nov 93
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Studies Association (Chicago, IL, November 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Instruction; Connected Discourse; Discourse Analysis; *Educational Philosophy; Elementary Secondary Education; Epistemology; Ethics; Higher Education; Inquiry; *Instruction; *Interpersonal Communication; Linguistics; *Modernism; Semantics; *Teaching Models
IDENTIFIERS *Conversation; *Postmodernism

ABSTRACT

This conference presentation is offered as a prolegomenon, or introduction, to a paper and research project. The issues of whether prolegomena are modernist explanatory devices and whether postmodern prolegomena are possible are discussed. The paper proposes a research inquiry into "postmodern teaching" initiated through the metaphor of conversations. The idea of conversations epitomizes postmodernity, as they are based in language; relational to persons, locations, and times; interpretive; and open-ended. Groups of persons engaged in conversations about teaching and teaching reform are recorded as they talk about their work. What teaching looks like depends on the conception of teaching from which ary teacher begins. Themes and concepts from these recordings frame the analysis (modernism) and disrupt it, pushing and interrupting boundaries (postmodernism). Various analyses of teaching have explored structural, linguistic or semantic, epistemological, and ethical dimensions. These modernist analyses utilize attention to language and to particular forms of logical inquiry to explain the meaning of teaching. Three other concepts characterizing modernist analysis include lucidity, progress, and emancipation. Postmodern teaching is characterized by the contingencies of situation, position, and relation; dissonance; fallibility; irony; and humility. (Contains 25 references.) (JDD)

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A PROLEGOMENON TO POSTMODERN TEACHING

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Paper presented
Annual meeting, American Educational Studies Association, Chicago
November 1993.

Educational research today is embedded in contexts, ones of the social construction of knowledges and worlds. An epochal context frames the moment, one seemingly "caught" between modernism and postmodernism. A temporal tension with all of its ramifications exists, ramifications concerning what research questions are asked, what research methodologies are employed, what research results are possible.

A postmodern perspective shifts research possibilities, indeed opening them up. Such a perspective, as I have written about in recent years, (Stone, 1991a, 1992, 1993) means two things. One is that modernist assumptions are at least questioned; the second is that they are questioned relative to postmodern "presuppositions." Several postmodern premises seem "certain:" the modern era no longer exists as previously and is no longer sacrosanct, and the modern quest for certainty is no longer valid. Moreover as modernity yields to postmodernity (or the former is appreciably altered), new forms of sensemaking in all human endeavors are not only possible but also needed.

A Project

In a new era, one Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) calls "the postmodern condition," education seems to require new conceptions as well as new

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research forms. One might posit that schools look different, that people in them have different needs than in previous times, that education's aims be revised. One might posit that teaching be reconceptualized because its modern conception(s) no longer apply.[1]

Proposed is a research inquiry into "postmodern teaching," initiated through the metaphor of conversations. The idea of conversations epitomizes postmodernity, based in language, relational to persons, locations and times, and "interpretive" and open-ended rather than explanatory and closed-off. Consider a typical conversation: two persons meet for a specific purpose. They work toward mutual understanding until that purpose is met. They require no exact declarations of meaning between them save the dynamic nuances of the interaction itself. The moment is now; the talk is now. The conversation occurs within a range of satisfaction and the participants move on.

Presumed is the following: Conversation is postmodern life. It is an educational moment. It is a research process.

The project tentatively titled "teaching conversations" employes both a form of qualitative interview and a modified philosophic analysis. Conversation is initially utilized to situate an educational time and its disoourses.[2] Groups of persons already engaged in conversations about teaching and teaching reform are recorded as they talk about their work. Themes and concepts from these recordings meet two research purposes. One, they frame the analysis and two, they disrupt it. Framing bounds the inquiry giving it form and direction but disruption pushes and interrupts the boundaries. The first aim is modern, establishing direction and control. The second aim is postmodern, disestablishing direction and

control. The moves are simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal (and perhaps this description is too linear). Most that can be said is that moments occur--they change--and they are neither completely determined nor completely random. Actual conversational contents in this postmodern process are utilized both to set some direction in reconceptualizing teaching and to call any direction into question. Something can be said but it is never taken for granted nor held onto forever. Its significance is now.

A Modern Prolemogenon?

Just presented is part of a prolegomenon, an introduction to a paper and to a research project. Its appropriateness is called into question: Are prolegomena (usually in plural form, the dictionary states) modernist explanatory devices? Are postmodern prolegomena possible? Can postmodern moments--and their research--be introduced, or introduced in the same ways as modern events?

A prolegomenon, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is a preface to a learned work, usually introductory or preliminary observations. The best known example in philosophy is Immanuel Kant's Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics. Writes Lewis White Beck (1950),

> The Prolegomena is. . . the best of all introductions to that vast and obscure masterpiece, the Critique of Pure Reason. It is a guide through what Kant. . .calls the 'thorny paths' of that work. . . . It has an exemplary lucidity and wit, making it unique among Kant's greater works (p. vii).

Even though, as Beck states, Kant appears to have considered this prolegomena prior to the publication of the first critique, it was actually published two years later. Moreover, it was written in response to a negative review of the book, to "answer questions and correct misunderstandings" (p. viii). Kant's overview, read today as an introduction, appeared as an overview and as a corrective device.

Prolegomena are written prior to as well as after major works. They have specific functions beyond merely introducing a work or making it comprehendible (usually to a less technical audience). They are intended to complement/compliment a more important work; they accompany works of philosophy and history, of literature, and of science.[3] The modern/postmodern question is whether prolegomenon(a) function to establish a foundation for the major work and whether this foundation is essentialist in any form. If the foundation is explanatory and essentialist the device is modern; if the foundation is merely "preparatory" then perhaps the device is postmodern. Determinination of what "preparatory" means determines the modern or postmodern intent. Finally, and this is important, whether postmodern moments are "prepared for" is the underlying question.

From a position of late or postmodernism one is tempted to answer the essentialist question of prolegomena by acknowledging the irony of such a question. Assessing the status of prolegomena requires attention to a prior question, and prior questions are preparation. Any preparation arises from its own preparation. Preparation is theory-laden, consisting, at the least, of the mental set required to ask the question in the first place (Harris, 1979). This means, of course, that all questions are

relative to contexts--to those referred to at the outset of this paper.

This "relativism," however, does not mean that modernist essentialism is overcome. A prolegomenon is still essentialist if it presents any theorizing, either in and of itself or as follows, as a unity, a totality (see Stone, 1992). Such a totality belies the postmodern critique. It does not alllow for explanation, for meaning beyond that which is presented. It does not allow for dispersed and deferred meaning, for gaps in understanding.[4]

A clarification about meaning is herein helpful. Theorists of the twentieth century as wideranging as Russell or Wittgenstein or Dewey initiated the "linguistic turn" and gave up the representational force of epistemology.[5] No longer is there a search for either subjective or objective, foundational certainty in knowing; no longer is "Truth" sought in the rationalist project of mind or the empiricist project of reality. Now, "truth" (if it is still considered at all) is sought in the propositions--the language statements--that people utter. This is a first step toward recognizing the uncertainty of meaning; a second is proposed by linguistic strucuturalists. The latter, led by Saussure recognize that language is uttered by people and that utterance has a logical gap. This is one of complexity, between the signifier and the signified, between what one says and one means, and between what is taken by someone else as said and meant.[6] Since these earlier times a second linguistic turn has been taken and language itself is deprivileged. There is no assurance of common meaning. There is only the parlance of what are now commonly called (after Wittgenstein) language games.

Thus any prolegomenon that purports to establish surety in meaning

either through its introductory framing or its "telling the whole tale" is essentialist and modernist. Moreover, any preparation is itself a postmodern moment with all of its uncertainty, a moment that cannot be essentially tied to the one that comes after it.

This raises a new question, one considered at the end of this paper: If postmodern moments are historicist, can they be theorized? Can they be written about rather than practiced?

Modernist Philosophy and Teaching

Beginning in the sixties, educational philosophy followed its parent discipline into the first linguistic turn and gave significant attention to discriminations of language usage and their relevance for educational practice. Not surprisingly, "analytic" philosophers wrote about the concept of teaching and have continued to do so almost to the present day (e. g. Pearson, 1989).

Given the second linguistic turn much of the work of analytic philosophers of education has come under fire as "positivist." That is, as seeking the certainty of the meaning of terms as did analytic forebearers. But such condemnation does double damage. First, it mystifies the accomplishments of helpful clarification under an often "critical" guise. Second, it fails to account for the development of analytic philosophy itself--away from this positive foundation. At its best, analytic philosophy is described as something to do, an activity. Says Thomas F. Green (1971),

> [P[hilosophy is always incomplete, usually tentative.
> never impersonal, full of false starts and blind alleys,
> replete with admissions of ignorance and puzzlement,

and almost always partisan (p. ix).

As an evolved field of inquiry, it has become--what many of its vociferous critics overlook--theory-laden, value-laden and even interest-laden. In a time of an acknowledged social construction of knowledge, its insights into educational ideas such as teaching need not be discounted and ignored. However, such an admonition need also not deny that these insights are modern rather than postmodern. More is said about this in what follows.

One way to conceptualize teaching is to begin, as Green (1971) suggests, by watching somebody do it (p. 1). A typical event of teaching occurs in classrooms and looks like this: A woman stands in front of a group of younger people. Over a given time, she says a great deal in an authoritative manner and her audience responds with less authority and much less talk. She declares and exhorts, asserts direct interrogatives and non-direct queries to which she expects compliance and answer. This arrangement of talk changes somewhat in the level of schooling and the "philosophy" of the teacher. The lecturer in a secondary classroom replaces the facilitator in an elementary setting but the teaching event looks pretty much the same.

As any student and teacher knows, just described is the instructional part of teaching. Other activities include such as these: consoling a weeping child on the playground, conferring with a concerned parent afterschool, consulting with fellows about math textbooks to buy for next year. As part of work any teacher plans, implements, and evaluates. He thinks a great deal about what he does, before, during and after the occurrence (Schon, 1983).

What teaching looks like depends on the conception of teaching from which any teacher begins. A caveat is in order: practices depend a great deal on tradition and custom that are often taken for granted. Indeed much of what passes for teaching activity depends on a conception of teaching that its "practitioners" have not examined--at least not systematically. This limits what teaching might be.

Another limitation on the meaning of teaching comes from relying too much on "watching somebody do it," since mere observational "data" cannot reveal the attitudes, desires, purposes or consequences of the behavior. Ways exist to get at the more subtle meanings of teaching--a first is to ask teachers to offer empirical description and a second is to ask philosophers to explore non-empirical explanation.

One example of the possible analyses explores structural, linguistic or semantical, epistemological, and ethical dimensions (and each of these has many possible approaches).

As indicated, Green's (1971) analysis of teaching begins with activity then adds knowledge and judgment that is evident through language usage. Structure consists of teachers reasons for doing one thing and not another, along with the inherent skills. This philosophical inquiry indicates what is a case of teaching rather than what ought to be a case or inventing new ones (p. 3). Its components are logical (conceptual), strategic, and institutional, elements that point to necessary functions, purposes and contexts. Green's account emphasizes the meaning of teaching found in the conceptual language that describes these components. For example, teaching is analyzed as the concepts of explaining, motivating, and keeping records. This structural analysis contrasts with explorations

also termed "structural," that are largely sociological rather than philosophical. These situate the meaning of teaching strongly in its social context and in influences such as the races/ethnicities, classes and genders of participants. A classic example of the latter is Michael Apple and Nancy King's Marxist study of kindergraten teaching as inculcation into work (1977).

In addition to the usage of one concept, logic also structures the meaning of teaching as distinctions between concepts, such as teaching and indoctrination, and as connections between them. For Gary Fenstermacher (1986), a teacher teaches when he

> knows, understands, or is able to do something that he is trying to share with the other person. That is, the person in possession of the knowledge or skill intends to convey it (p. 38).

Here teaching connects importantly with learning through intention and with knowledge as that which is intended to be taught and learned. The conceptual relationship, explains Fenstermacher, is "woven into the fabric our language," (p. 39) and arises from the close empirical relationship of two activities. Logically, also, the relationship is ontological but not causal. This means that teaching depends on learning--the first term makes no sense if the second is never connected. Significantly, however, causal connection is denied since logically also no act of teaching can necessarily guarantee what results from it. Such an analysis places learning in the lap of the student rather than the teacher whose own lap holds teaching instead. As Fenstermacher sums, "a central task of teaching is to enable the student to perform the tasks of learning. . . . As the

student becomes skilled. . . he or she learns" (p. 39). Thus the analysis reveals that the concept causally tied to learning is not teaching but "studenting."

Epistemological understanding of teaching is effected through two avenues; the first is its logical connection to knowledge. The philosophical assertation is that something must be taught and this something in the largest sense is knowledge. Otherwise there is no content for teaching and the concept is vacuous. The second is discussed by B. O. Smith (1987) as the development of a science, an epistemology of teaching. A science establishes truth in asserted generalizations about the world, and for many in recent decades this has been the purpose of teaching research. States Smith:

> As a science of pedagogy (teaching) continues to develop, its language will more and more consist of terms on whose use there is universal agreement. Dependable inferences are possible only when precise and unambiguous terms are used. . . . [This is important] not only for the advancement of. . .[teaching's] knowledge base, but also for the development of an effective system of practice (p. 15).

Significant epistemological premises presuppose such a view, ones concerning both what comprises knowledge and what constitutes teaching as knowledge.[8]

Identified above, a final analytic domain is ethical, one based in the relationship of persons inherent in teaching (and especially in the teaching and learning connection). Alan Tom (1984) identifies this "basis" for teaching as the power differential between teacher and student, as

well as in the necessary selection process of curriculum--of the knowledge element. The point is that some content is always included and other content not included. Moreover, Tom explains, "a curriculum plan. . . [of the content of teaching] must contain a conception of desirable ends. . .[and of a case made for them]" (p. 95). Related inquiry also contributes here: as sociological studies of the hidden curriculum and of the reproduction of cultural capital (as worthwile knowledge) support the logical analysis of curriculum content and its connection to teaching.

A second example from Nel Noddings (1984) establishes an ontological ethic of teaching in the necessary relation of persons to each other in a teaching-learning dyad. For her, caring is the principal relation. A concept inherent in the relation is fidelity--attachment to particular persons and particular relations (Noddings, 1986, p. 497). The centrality of fidelity is put thusly:

> When our fidelity is a way of life, unshakable in its caring for the people under our gaze, we can look at other admirable goals. . .[such as knowledge acquisition] and ask what they mean, how they serve the purposes of community and personal growth, and how best we can achieve them without betraying the persons with whom we will remain faithful (p. 503).

Noddings attention to the ethics of teaching, along with that of Tom, enlarges what analytic philosophers of education such as Green, Fenstermacher and others have recognized as the normative aspects of the activity, and of its language. Jonas Soltis (1978) identifies three "value" aspects of education (and thus of teaching). These are that

something of value is taught and learned, that decisions about this value are made daily, and that values help settle disagreements over these processes and decisions (pp. 84-85). To this traditional analysis of the normative dimensions of teaching is now added one precisely ethical in the relations/relationships of persons involved. Lastly, to this can also be added the ethics of structural relations, of the relative power (and of such norms as equal opportunity) of various societal groups.

Modernity to Postmodernity

The previous analyses utilize attention to language and to particular forms of logical inquiry to explain the meaning of teaching. These inquiries are structural in terms of the categories within the activity of teaching, linguistic in terms of the distinctions and connections of teaching and its closely related concepts, epistemological in terms of the knowledge entailments of the content and process of teaching, and ethical (adding to the other logical features) in terms of the persons to whom the activity of teaching has direct meaning. These are modern inquiries for several reasons. A brief explanation follows that indicates what is now identified as a modern/postmodern tension.

Already presented is the idea that analysis is modern if it seeks foundational or explanatory certainty. if in any way it premises essentialism in a theory of unity, totality, or teleology. Essentialisms comes in forms of individual or cultural universals, of principles or generalizations out of particulars--of any explanation that extends beyond its own situation, its own time, place and persons. This means that analytic philosophy of education is modern (and this is not a negative value judgment) even with Green's demurs of incompleteness. Modern

incompleteness presupposes that completeness or essentialism is still possible.

Suggestive in the previous section are, besides the norm of essentialism, three other "narratives" (Lyotard, 1984) that are indicative of modernism. Narratives, according to Lyotard, characterize an epoch because they are central to the mind set of its participants. In western, capitalist, liberal, democratic modernity, three narratives (some of them "grand narratives") are lucidity, progress, and emancipation, and these three are tied to an underlying narrative of identity.[9]

Lucidity or clarity is modern first because it focuses on language elucidation and on truth, and second because it leads to successful human action. In typical analysis the unity of a concept is taken apart for "true" understanding. One path toward clarity is through the demonstration of clear cases, and another is through the setting out of necessary and sufficient conditions. A third is through illustrative exemplification combined with other linguistic distinctions. Lucidity or clarity comes in separating off the meaning of teaching from other familial resemblances.[10] Analysis in its positivist form is precisely to clarify the intent, direction, and end of the activity--of any human activity referenced by the concept. Clarity, at least in the earliest analyses, is also to separate philosophical inquiry from those sociological or psychological that extend beyond the internal logic of the concept under investigation (Green, 1971, pp. 12, 13).

Lucidity, of course, contributes logically toward progress. Ideas are to become clearer and clearer and this is good. The normative stance ties language to the social theory that underpins it (earlier analysts denied

the social project of their work but saw progress as logical). Lucidity is good as it moves toward better and better understanding; it is an aim for perfection. Modern progress takes many forms: of the directions of historical periods (toward more civilized existence), of the aims of societies (toward provision of the good life), of individuals (toward realization of rationality). Furthermore, in the ideas or theories of modern science and economics, progress is connotatively inherent. That is, in the modern era that either domain is nonsensical without the idea of progress and its siblings accretion and accumulation.

In addition to the analytic project, progress characterizes the society of which analysis is a part. The society, so the narrative goes, is liberal and democratic and thus values human emancipation. Analysis utilizes rationality to work toward freedom for all persons--using that which is essential to all persons to accomplish it. Freedom is also the aim of a second modern theoretical tradition, the critical. It broke off from what is known as "the tradition" beginning in the nineteenth century with the development of sociology (and the other interpretive sciences). It moved theory from "outside" society, as in a neutral posture, to "within" society. Lyotard (1993) writes in sum that

> during the 19th and 20th centuries. . .there were disputes, even wars, between conservatives and leftists over the very name of the subject we are to help to become emancipated. Nevertheless, all the parties concurred in the same belief that enterprises, discoveries, and institutions are legitimate only insofar as they contribute to the emancipation of mankind

(p. 172).

Finally underlying narratives of lucidity (of rationality), progress, and emancipation, is one of identity. Modern western identity is locatable and solitary: the individual is the unit of analysis. Individuals possess rationality that enables them to act efficaciously in the world. Part of that action is the acquisition of knowledge--to know objects, states of affairs, and other persons with certainty. Identity of "the self" is itself a modern aim, as each person seeks to understand who he is and what she can accomplish. The aim is to pin this down, but this changes as modernity exists in tension with postmodernity.

Just what characterizes the present era is still and may remain uncertain. Many explanations are offered; these pose together an attitude toward the central tenets and practices of modernity. This is to question them, to suggest that modernity is changing or has changed into something different and new. The postmodern, at the least, is both endemic to the recent past and in tension with the modern. Some changes are fairly stark as in architecture and some of the arts, and as well in the giving up of modernist essentialism and lucidity. Others as postmodern attitudes toward progress and emancipation are less differentiated from those previously held. It is difficult for western liberal democrats to acknowledge the failures of, and indeed the futility in some minds, of universal change for the better, and for the betterment of the human condition. Lastly part of the postmodern is to recognize the fluidity and multiplicity of identity(s)--no self as Freud theorized is opaque and understandable.

The postmodern is complex, unable to be neatly analyzed, simplified or reduced for understanding. It has several evident dimensions: What seems

gone, at least for the present, is unbridled faith in certainty in all of its forms; what seems here, at least for the present, is a kind of skepticism. Difference is present, sameness is gone. Particularly is present, generality is gone. Locality is present, universality is gone. All of these dimensions, as Lyotard asserted, have both liberal and conservative orientations.

Postmodern Teaching

As stated above, in postmodernity (or late modernity if one wishes) the certain expectations of language have also changed and a second linguistic turn has taken place. Wittgenstein's language games paved the way as did work on logic by Peirce and Dewey; the continental project with its strong social frame in neo-Marixsm contributed as well. As stated previously, language meaning is open and "analyses" operate like conversations (even these may be too totalizing). Language is non-privileged as meaning as in the present case, the meaning of teaching. Firstly, teaching looks different when contingency and dissonance characterize it rather than constancy and consonnance.[11] Secondly, teaching looks different when fallibility, irony and humility characterize it.

Contingency. Contingency is a postmodern "resting," a concept from which to think about teaching for a time. It assumes the nuances of ambiguity and dispersed meaning of postmodern language. Contingency, I have suggested, is a central part of the experience of teachers who know that their planning for and interactions with students are seldom if ever realized as they envision them. Contingency is other than "dependency" on an aim not yet realized or as other than the norm. It is ironically an

essentially non-essential, a non-certain certainty. Among the myriad of possible contingencies that describe postmodern teaching are ones of situation, position, and relation.

Situation encapsulates a temporal dimension of the postmodern, one recognized by such social theorists as Jean-Paul Sartre and Frederic Jameson.[12] Situation is what is made of life's flow; the concept references the inessential "unity" of events, of their momentariness. "Moments are interrupted and their meaning is diffused--indeed at any particular time. . . . [They] are just 'what they are,' and their meanings are no longer transferrable, one to another, or generalizable, one to the many" (Stone, 1993, p. 826). Life becomes, as in the postmodern situation, an always-changing redescription of meaning.

Just as situation is lived in the postmodern moment, so is position. This term encapsulates the societal, structural location of persons as they live. Positions are identified by such attributes as race, class and gender. Given new meaning out of modernity, position is no longer definitive of persons lives but also understood as contingent. One element of the contingency, of course, is chance--one cannot determine one's birth, one's initial place. One cannot, nor can a society determine, the situations of persons. Still recognized are dimensions of structural influence on lives but "poststructures" are "more meaningful." This means any position is itself understood as fluid and changing as are all others.

Morality of social life is added with a contingency of relation. This idea encapsulates the connection and obligation of persons to each other. Redescribing Nel Noddings (1984) ontological and modern relation, a postmodern relation is historically contingent. It is socially constructed

even if the evidence of relation among persons is present since the inception of human life. Relation means that connections are lived with and are taken into account in situations--even as they extend beyond any of them. This is a morality of natural and situational care rather than one of the application of essential rules. Persons choose to live in connection--this is relational contingency.

Dissonance. In addition to contingency, the idea of dissonance is characteristic of postmodern teaching. As I have written, this is an "always-tentative proposal. . .[that ideas] of dispersion and difference--even disruption and dissent--begin to re-place. . .ideas of convergence, conflation, consent and even community" (Stone, 1991b, p. 1). Herein teaching is redefined not just as an activity to be analyzed but as a "discourse practice" to be embedded in sets of social relations. One set of social relations is language: thus teaching is "really" a language element to be explicated as it relates to other language elements. Such a theorizing, importantly, shifts attention away from "experiential" aspects, away from merely what persons do to what they do/say/and as what is said and done about do/say.

The language of dissonance says something about teaching, even if in very abstract terms. Dissonance is ralated to difference, a key concept of postmodernity. It questions sameness that underlies essentialism, for instance in universals: persons have the same essence that is rationality; persons act in the same singularity that is autonomy. Likewise practices occur accoss cultures as "the same," e. g. all classrooms look alike; and practices are described in terms that omit their anomalies. Difference has a significant postmodern basis in the semiotic account of language

referred to previously. What in poststructuralism and deconstructionism are known as "lacks" point to the indeterminancy of language, and in what can be known about teaching.

One more utilization of difference refers to the modern concept of identity. Postmodern conceptions suggest that not only are persons particular as they live each moment but that also, as indicated, there are "differences" within each one. The present feminisms development and attention to identity arises from a concern for and validation of differences among persons. Importantly, as Foucault recognized, this is not a neutral "individualism" (and consider what this does to teaching/learning theory), but is rather a poststructural theorization of group/attribute differences.

Finally dissonance is seen in historical terms, in the postmodern idea of historicism. Historicism means that there is no historical telelogy or continuity, that events are seen in their particularity and as breaks and ruptures from the past in changing social relations.[13] Classrooms and teaching acts are different in this moment than in the one just past. This is not to say that understanding of the present is not "predicated" in some way on the past. But, it is to say that there is no causal necessity in temporal connection--that is, in sensemaking and its discourse practices.

Other postmodern possiblities. Implicated in the descriptions just offered are three other postmodern concepts; these are fallibility, irony, and humility.

Bridging modernism and postmodernism is the concept of fallibility. The modern tradition of fallibilism connects to skepticism--to assertions

of doubt and possible error. A postmodern "turn" means that one is "always" mistaking since there is nothing about which to be right or correct. Again there is a basic ambiguity in all case, in all discourses. In teaching, each moment has its own falliblism, its own error to be lived with. This does not mean, of course, that chaos reigns or that action is impossible. It means rather that any form of ordering, of sensemaking, is tentative. Any teaching, as in the present discussion, is open to any possible interpretation (bounded by context, of course), more than one subsequent action, influences of chance, and dispersed meaning.

Irony arises from fallibilism because it points to contradictions, to inherent and intended mistakings. It builds upon the epochal tension in which there are many possible meanings. This is so because discourse practices continue to utilize modernist language even as they are postmodern events.[14] How can it be anything but usual that language has double meanings in such uncertain times. Irony is present in this statement and throughout this paper as assertions carrying the tone of certainty are offered about uncertainty. In teaching, finally, irony abounds. In classrooms, teachers and students carry on as if they do understand each other. Custom and tradition govern actions; convention covers the ambiguous so that it is not apparent. But, when pressed, everyone "knows" of the "true" state of affairs. They know of uncertainty.

Fallibility and irony point to the third postmodern concept, that of humility. This ironically seems natural and given in an uncertain world and it lends a significant dimension to social construction. Modern persons at least in theory have assurance that what they propose is rational, purposeful, and able to be realized. Postmodern persons know no

such assurance. Because of this, they cannot take themselves as serious as modern "man" (at least previously) took himself. This introduces a playfulness into postmodern discourses and with it the possiblility of new practices. Playfulness, as the culture critics explain, has many dimensions--including the grotesque and carnivalesque. One well imagines these elements in teaching, in today's classrooms.

Conclusion

Just concluded is a prolegomenon to a conception of postmodern teaching. Asked at the outset were questions about progomena, about their modern construction. Asked also was whether postmodernism can be theorized as just completed. Ironically one is tempted to pose that postmodern moments each must be lived and not theorized. This is because of their particularity, their historicity, their "essence" as momentary ideas.

Notes

1 The theoretical question is to move away from modernist representation. What postmodern theorizing "looks like" is problematic.

2 Discourses are languages, attednat practices and their social relations. More subsequently on this.

3 Two examples are Saul (1957) and Whalen (1976).

4 See Cleo Cherryholmes (1988) for a postmodern, deconstructionist account of curriculum practices.

5 See the collection edited by Richard Rorty (1992).

6 A helpful collection is from Ennis (1985).

7 In modern terms, events still look somewhat different in different eras.

Examples are assertions that knowledge is justified, true belief, formed as propositions of "knowing that" and "knowing how." For connections to teaching, see Soltis (1978).

9 I have interpreted Lyotard broadly here.

10 References to language families usually refer to Wittgenstein's move toward the ambiguity of language.

11 See Stone 1993; 1991b.

12 See Frederic Jameson on Sartre (1984).

13 For an account of teacher education reform in this postmodern tradition of social relations, see Popkewitz (1991).

14 Rorty suggests that vocabularies work today as descriptions of practices that evolve in new ways but that are recognized in retrospect. See Rorty (1989).

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